

FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST

Does everything in your house have its rightful place? I unload the dishwasher occasionally. I may take something out of the dishwasher and stand there wondering where to put it! That is also my response sometimes when trouble comes my way. I stand there holding it, wondering how this fits into my life. Why did this happen to me?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock.

Every human being is subject to pain, suffering, and discouragement. Some people meet these things more often than others. But whenever trouble strikes it is never pleasant. When suffering comes our way the tendency is to lose our sense of direction. We stall out like an airplane flying straight up. We begin to search in vain for a place to put this suffering. How does it fit into my life? Sometimes, sickness, pain, or suffering can be such a staggering event that it completely disrupts life. Things cannot remain the same.

Take the passing of a beloved spouse, for instance. You have lived with this person most of your life. What great sorrow has filled your life! Things cannot remain the same. Take the onset of a disease like cancer as another example. Things have changed. Now your focus becomes getting rid of the disease. Things cannot remain the same.

Think spiritually for a moment: you haven't been serving God through Jesus Christ. Your sins have condemned you. You have been peddling down the broad way that leads to eternal ruin. Now you have come to yourself. Now, you are growing older and may even be approaching your own death. Now, you see that you have a great problem. Where can you put that problem? Like the Gentiles of whom Paul wrote, you are without hope, and without God in the world. Surely, friend, you do not want things to remain the same! Will you ride this sinful lifestyle to your grave? Isn't it time for a change.

If you are laboring under the burden of sin, or if you are suffering because of physical problems, then Jesus Christ can lift that load. That's right. No, he may not heal you or prolong your life here on earth, but Christ will give you a hope

that can only be realized. Obey the Christ and he will give you a promise that you will find to be wonderful. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10 KJV.) Using the metaphor of a sheep fold, Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep." (John 10:9-11 KJV.) And so, Jesus gave His life so that your life could be changed.

There are three ways that people generally respond to trouble: (1) they can rebel and grow bitter. (2) They can gradually give in under the constant pressure until they break. (3) Or, people can respond positively with a positive attitude. You can go through your problem, or you can grow through your problem. Either way, you like Paul will learn something about yourself. Paul had received many wonderful revelations from Jesus Christ, long after Jesus had departed from this world. Christ taught Paul the gospel through those revelations. The Bible calls this inspiration. In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul wrote, "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9 ESV.) You see, this apostle of Jesus Christ was not happy about his physical problem. However, when finally he learned that Christ was not going to remove it, but that Christ would supply him grace, then Paul responded positively to it. "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." In another place, the apostle wrote about that power when he said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13.) Paul was in prison when he wrote that line. The Philippian Christians had sent Paul a gift to help him in his imprisonment. Paul wrote them to thank them and said, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity." But then Paul added, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me." (Philippians 3:11-13 ESV.)

Things were not pleasant for the apostle, but Paul was full of joy. How could Paul have unpleasant circumstances, but still experience joy? Are not unpleasantness and joyfulness mutually exclusive? Can you have both at the same time? You see, It was Paul's relationship with Jesus Christ that brought him the joy even in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. That's right! Paul had learned that he could endure anything for the sake of Christ.

If you are a servant of Jesus Christ you are **not** going to recycle through a world of suffering. Jesus is going to receive you when you die. Paul knew his life would end; he knew that he would suffer for the name of Christ. In fact, Christian historians tell us that Paul was killed in Rome around the year 67 A.D. But that did not worry the apostle. Why? Because of what lay ahead. While in prison Paul wrote, "I know that through your prayers [the prayers of Christian friends] and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this [imprisonment] will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." (Philippians 1:19-24 ESV.) Paul was willing to live and complete any work the Lord wanted him to complete, but he was also ready to lay down his life. Why? He was ready because of that next chapter of life that awaited him.

Are you a person who does not know what will happen to you in the next life? Do you think this life is all there is? Do you think you will have another opportunity to obey Christ in purgatory, about which the Bible says nothing, and thus only the doctrine of some men? Do you think you will just be recycled through a world of sin and suffering? Maybe you will return as an animal or a tree? Are you just hoping for something better in a corrupt world? Friends, God does not promise another opportunity to obey Him outside or inside of this world. Nor is God interested in recycling you; God wants you to move forward in a straight line to an eternity with Him in the world to come. Peter called that place a "new heaven and a new earth" wherein dwells righteousness. No more sin or sorrow. No more pain and suffering for the child of God, the follower of Jesus Christ. Paul called it a "crown of righteousness." (2 Timothy 4:8 ESV.) Jesus' half-brother James called

it a “crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 ESV.) Peter called it “an unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:4 ESV.) Jesus called it also “the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10 ESV.) In Revelation 3:11, it is recorded where Jesus said, “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” You see friend, it will take endurance to stay with the Lord Jesus Christ. But the reward will be beyond our imaginations.

Christians can have joy in the midst of trial. We know what shelf suffering is kept upon. We know what to do with it. We know that suffering can be a sign of a faithful citizen of God’s kingdom. Jesus was talking about Paul when he said, “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” (Acts 9:16 ESV.) Peter and John rejoiced after being beaten by persecutors. They were glad that they “were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” of Christ. (Acts 5:41 ESV.) It has been granted to Christians that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in him but also suffer for his name’s sake. (Philippians 1:29 ESV.) Paul forewarned all of those who heard him preach. To the Thessalonians he wrote, “when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.” Were these Christians ashamed of the treatment they received at the hands of Satan? No. The apostle Paul said, “I am not ashamed [of suffering the way I do], for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what [I have committed unto him, KJV].” (2 Timothy 1:12 ESV.) Peter wrote, “For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (21) For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (22) He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (23) When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” (1Peter 2:20-23 ESV.) “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (1Peter 4:19 ESV.)